

The youngest poles physical condition

THE DEMOGRAPHY OF CONTEMPORARY POLISH CHILDHOOD

Piotr Szukalski
University of Łódź, Łódź

INTRODUCTION

Demography leaves childhood understood as a period in human life at the margins of its interest. Leaving alone the fact of birth, during its first years of live – before starting a sexually active period of life and especially before the period of procreation – a child is taken no account of within the demographic perspective. The only exception is made for those children who have experienced some significant demographic events – death or migration. Such attitude is partly a result of the tradition, i.e. the continuation of the research within the already explored areas, partly a result of the lack of occurrence of events during this period of human life and partly a result of the lack of demographically relevant behaviors within the process of sexual reproduction within the duration of this period.

In the following paper I wish to concentrate not so much on the data on children (i.e. persons defined on the basis of the criterion of chronological age as being aged 0–14) as rather to go beyond the presentation of mere figures and concentrate on meta-data – measurements and demographic and epidemiological indicators that provide us with the indirect information on the quality of childhood in contemporary Poland. What I have in mind when applying the term 'contemporary Poland' is the situation within the last decade, i.e. the decade the information on which is available in statistical data bases, namely 1998–2007.

At the same time, I wish to try to articulate here those currently perceptible phenomena, which – though appearing as being of little importance in the light of statistical data hereby presented – will have an influence on adult lives of people who are now children.

The main obstacle on the path of realization of the aim thus proposed is the lack of sufficiently precise data. What I have in mind when talking about the precision and accuracy of the data is, first and foremost, the more disaggregated data in place of the homogeneous data with regard to the most important differentiating factor – age. It is within many statistical studies that children aged 0–14 are treated as one unified category. In some other statistics disaggregation applies to the 5-year age-scope groups and sometimes, additionally, within the 0 to 4 age group the infants (children during the first 12 months of life) and the toddlers are being distinguished as two separate categories. From the obvious reasons such a level of aggregation overshadows the clarity of the picture, often making a 12-year-old and a 2-year-old equals. Another factor that poses an impediment for the analysis of data is a shortage of a larger amount of data concentrated around a specific problem or situation in which children may find themselves.

CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD IN THE LIGHT OF DEMOGRAPHY

When talking about the demography of childhood it seems necessary to adopt as a point of departure a trivial statement that the number of children in contemporary Poland is continuously decreasing though, during the last decade, the number of infants began to rise from 2003 onwards. This recent increase, however, does not change the overall tendency which is a simple consequence of the fact that the number of births despite the 2003–2008 increase is still lower than in the first half of the 90ties¹. Consequently, the 0–14 age group is being deserted by relatively numerous groups each year while the new members are still few in comparison.

A large portion of current children comprises of the only children (children with no brothers or sisters) since almost one-third of the first-born babies will not have brothers or sisters. For instance, within the conditions of the sustained fertility pattern of 2007, among the first-born 32,3% would not have siblings, 46,4% would have a brother or a sister, 8,7% would have two of them, 12,6% would have 3 of them or more. This would mean, however, that only 16,1% of all children would be raised within a family with one child only, 46,4% would be raised by families with two children, further 13% within the families with three children and 24,5% within the more numerous families (calculations based on RRL 2008, p. 91). This, in turn, means that families with three children or more would constitute 21,3% of all the families and would raise 37,5% of all the Polish children.

As a result of low fertility rates children born now in Poland have relatively bigger chances for receiving attention and good care from their parents- much more so than two or three decades ago². There is now less competition for attention, time and resources between brothers and sisters and no such competition in case of an only-child. This is supported by what can be termed as the 'child-centrism' apparent especially with reference to the minimal susceptibility of child-related spending to changes in income level and with regard to the readiness on the part of parents to keep the child-related spending unharmed at the cost of reductions in other areas (Dobrodzicka 1998). The negative side of such a situation is the lack of opportunities to develop social skills and to learn mutual cooperation for children raised without brothers and sisters.

From the point of view of conditions in which children are being raised it is also important to note that the age of mothers has been on the increase during the last two decades (as has the age of fathers, though to a lesser degree). By this token children have older parents, more mature and better prepared emotionally for the parenting. It may be that the increased age of parents also means better material (economic) conditions in comparison with situation whereby parents are younger. This would be due to the more stable professional and financial situation of older parents. On the negative side, however, the increase in age of parents brings with itself, on the one hand, a greater risk of the occurrence of serious health problems that the older parents may experience, and, on the other hand, a greater demand for care on the part of grandparents in case of the so-called *sandwich generation*³ (though it should be noted, realistically speaking, that this usually becomes a considerable problem when children are already teenagers).

THE DEMOGRAPHIC DANGERS FOR CHILDHOOD

In this part I would like to have a look at the demographic processes which influence – if not decide upon altogether – the quality of childhood.

In comparison with their counter-parts born 10 or 20 years ago, contemporary children are much less threatened by the risk of death during the period of their childhood. The reduction in death rate during the period of childhood was present also in 1998–2007 when the likelihood of death in case of a child of male sex before reaching his 15th birthday lowered from 0,01381 to 0,00955, while the same indicator for female children lowered from 0,01150 to 0,00757, i.e. the reduction was by almost one-third. This took place thanks to the

reduction in mortality during the first year of life by approximately 40% of the initial value.

This positive tendency with regard to child mortality, however, is accompanied all over the world by the growth of population of children in demand of constant care. The reduction in death rate during the first days and weeks of life means the lack of natural selection and the appearance of children able to live only when their life functions are sustained in artificial conditions. However little data there is on this phenomenon, it is at a glance that we can notice the growing number of children and teenagers suffering from, to give some examples, brain damage, the Down disease and similarly serious conditions. This fact is usually left unmentioned in the majority of the analyses of the long-term changes and processes connected with childhood.

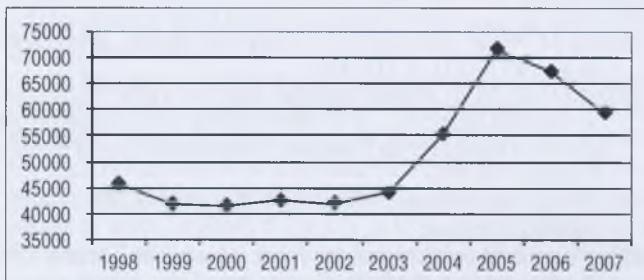
The contemporary new-born Polish children are much less often orphaned by their biological parents than their counterparts were in the past. As calculations based on statistics on mortality show (Szukalski 2009), the probability of becoming an orphan for the children aged 0–15 reduced by one-third in the period 1995–2005 with the probability of becoming fully orphaned being now half its value in 1995. Though it is true that the postponement of the decision to have children makes the portion of orphans larger the total number remains smaller due to the reduced death rates.

Reduced death-rates not only decrease the probability of becoming a child with no biological parents but also increases chances of staying in touch with the older family members, namely: grandparents and great-grandparents. This increases the chances of receiving care from grandparents, especially since the reduced birth-rates make the number of grandchildren smaller and thus the competition for grandparents' support and attention is lessened. It is difficult, however, to point out the advantages for children from having a wider range of grandparents and great-grandparents present in their life since, in the Polish context, one needs to remember about the usually poor health of people above the age of 70.

At the same time the scale of the process of becoming the so-called social orphans among the Polish children is on the increase. A dynamic rise in the number of divorces in recent years and big-scale economic migrations are among the most crucial reasons for such a state of affairs.

During the 1998–2007 decade it was 475 thousand children aged 0–15 (this is the age spectrum used in most statistics on the subject) that experienced the divorce of their parents, of which 183,8 thousand were children aged 0–6 at the moment of court's judgment and consequently too young to understand the reasons behind their parents' decision to separate and to consciously and somehow skillfully adjust to the new circumstances.

Diagram 1. *Number of children going through the divorce of their parents, Poland, 1998–2007*



Source: Demographic annual reports from different years.

Two problems seem to be of importance here:

1) the highest number of children going through their parents' divorce occurred in 2005 (71,6 thousand) while the highest number of divorces was observed in 2006;

2) the number of children going through their parents' divorce changed more dynamically in recent years than the actual number of divorces granted.

This seems to suggest that the impact of highly negative consequences of the legislation passed in 2003 on family benefits and civil status of parents was serious, as we need to keep in mind the fact that the group that was most prone to divorce at that time was made of families with bigger than average number of children⁴. The legislation in question (Act from November 28, 2003 on family benefits) stated that the limit of income introduced for the purposes of social assistance will be calculated in a manner more favourable to single-parents families. This, in turn, led to a situation whereby taking a divorce and rising children as a, *de jure*, single parent increased chances for being granted social assistance benefits and family allowances.

When discussing divorce it needs to be stated, however, that during the last decade there were some positive changes in case-law, namely: the custody was granted more often to both mother and father (a steady increase from 28,4% in 1998 to 37,1% in 2007), primarily as a direct result of a less frequent practice of granting exclusive custody rights to mothers (from 65,8% to 57,1% respectively). It should be emphasized that we are faced here with a tendency that should be regarded as very positive from the point of view of children's well-being and which is, at the same time, a part of a long-term trend that could be observed already in late 1980-ties.

As far as the impact of migration is concerned, there is no reliable statistics. Estimations made by the Ministry of National Education on the basis of a survey conducted in 2008 by the headmasters of primary and secondary schools indicated that there might be as much as 52 thousand euro-orphans, including 8 thousand full orphans (both parents migrated abroad and stay in another country). The statistics by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy say that in 2007 there were 1299 cases of children passed to Orphanages and for adoption due to their parents migrating abroad. It seems reasonable to suspect, however, that the actual scale of the problem is significantly larger than those estimations may suggest.

Another demographic danger for childhood can be found in the increase of alternative models of family life. These include primarily unspecified relations of partnership and grater risk of a break-up due to a less rigorous character of fulfilling their parenting roles, especially in case of fathers. Available statistics allow for a re-enactment of changes taking place by means of analysis of birth-rates outside the institution of marriage. During the decade in question the total amount of births outside marriage was 565,6 thousand, the increase being from 45,7 thousand in 1998 to 75,5 thousand in 2007. The number of children born outside marriage but becoming the so-called pre-marital offspring due to their parents legalizing their relationship is unknown. This does not change the fact that the number of children raised in a non-formal relationship is growing. Obviously, the scale of the deliberate single motherhood is unknown though information gathered and presented by the media suggests the number of mothers deciding to raise a child on their own is growing as well.

It is worth remembering, however, that, as the results of the analysis of recent population census suggest (Szukalski 2009a), the characteristics of mothers rising children on their own look much less favourable than similar data on mothers living within a marriage. This refers to age, sources of income, level of education, professional activity. Therefore, among children raised in non-legalized relationships the problems with proper diet, buying educational or recreational services and equipping for school might be more frequent in comparison to the traditional, marital unions.

Another factor directly influencing the quality of childhood, especially when referring to the range of parenting competence and access to material goods necessary for investment in children's development, is becoming parents at an early age. In general, the number of children of teenage mothers born during the last decade equaled 238,5 thousand, including 15 thousand born to mothers aged 16 and under at the time of birth. The number of children born to teenage mothers decreased quickly from 30,4 thousand to 19,9 thousand, however the last three years saw certain stagnation in the process and even a small growth (Szukalski 2009b). Par-

ticularly negative situation takes place in case when also a father is a very young person. However, in this case there is no complete data since, though in 2007 8,5% of teenage mothers declared the age of the father being under 20, 29,9% of mothers refused to inform about the age of the father of their child (one can suspect that it was due to the lack of contact with the biological father of the child). Among the teenage mothers that gave information about the age of the biological father of their child the percentage of those who declared the age to be under 20 was 12,1.

SOCIAL DANGERS FOR CHILDHOOD

In this part of my paper I wish to focus on a number of issues which are often left unmentioned by the social researchers and commentators. What I have in mind is to delineate various dimensions that have an impact on child's chances to receive an apt investment in human capital – not only knowledge, qualifications, and skills but also health.

First of all, it should be remembered that the readiness on the part of Polish people to have children is diversified across social groups. For instance, estimates based on 2003 population census that refer to the total fertility rates across education levels show that women with basic education had 1,65 child while women with higher education only 0,95⁵ (Strzelecki 2007, p. 31). Therefore – since education is a great factor marking the economic and material conditions that a child is provided with – the highest birth rates are observable among the groups that are less prepared to offer favourable material conditions for children's development. Due to the concentration of births within the groups marked by lower material status the correlation between poverty and the big-size families is hardly a surprise for the researchers.

Secondly, as we already know, more than one-third of children are being raised in numerous families with a greater risk of poverty. If we add to this the greater propensity on the part of uneducated women to have children and growing significance of non-formal models of family we are left with situation whereby a large number of children have unfavorable conditions for growth and development during the first years of their life and event before their birth. It needs to be remembered that, according to the Barker's hypothesis (1996) there is a direct relationship between a woman's diet during pregnancy and the health of a child and, later on, an adult person. According to this hypothesis, insufficient or unhealthy diets influence the prenatal development of the child. In case of lack of sufficient portions of proteins, vitamins, and microelements the organism of a child is forced to choose into which organs these elements should, so to speak, be invested. In such a case, the organs favoured are those of strategic importance (primarily the nervous system) at the cost of less important ones (e.g. liver, kidneys, some elements of the blood system). As a result, children of poorly nourished mothers are prone to have underdeveloped organs, inappropriate physiology and metabolism, which, in turn, makes them more inclined to develop health problems such as diabetics, blood-pressure problems, heart diseases and others.

Therefore, the awareness of the fact that, within the Polish context, poverty is correlated with the number of children in a family makes one conclude that the condition of health of children raised in poor families will by itself increase the risk of later diseases and serious health problems in the future and, by the same token, decrease the chances for significant improvement in quality of their lives and, to some extent, in their economic and social status. It may be that a partial solution is offered by the possibility of financing the purchase of vitamins and diet supplements by the authorities for all the pregnant women.

CONCLUSION

The reader of this paper might have been surprised by a very general character of most of the remarks put here. This is a result of the intention of an author faced with a lack of sufficient data to

discuss important and socially urgent matters. Unfortunately, writing on the demography of Polish childhood – due to the limits just mentioned – means taking new and unexplored directions.

Regardless of all the shortcomings of the presented argumentation it is possible to make a synthesis of the discussed issues covering the area of the quality of childhood and its results, i.e. its effects on the human capital. Despite all the numerous negative tendencies it seems that the last decade, from the point of view of demographic analysis, should be evaluated as generally positive. From the obvious reasons, however, researchers should focus on the grimmer parts of the social reality presented here. The increase in the number and frequency of divorces, non-formal and continuously unstable relationships as well as appearance of the so-called euro-orphans and the negative disproportion between total fertility rates across educational and material divisions which leads to strengthened correlation between poverty and the size of a family and an increase in the number of children in demand of constant care are all processes that necessitate further study and greater expertise. The main conclusion of the paper is that the scale of our ineptitude and ignorance when faced with social problems thus presented is too large, especially with relation to the mechanisms, causes and consequences of the processes discussed as well as with relation to their social and territorial diversification briefly described in this paper.

¹ In 1993 there were 494,3 thousand children born in Poland, fifteen years later, i.e. in 2008 the number was 414 thousand, thus the number of children aged 0–14 decreased. There is, however, a lot of data that supports the prediction that this negative tendency may be overturned in 2010.

² This, in turn, means that those children, being often the only-ones, will be faced with a greater burden of taking care of their old parents than people usually are today.

³ The term 'sandwich generation' is used in the Anglophone literature to denote a group of people under the pressure to provide care for, at the same time, their adolescent children and their elderly parents. This usually takes place in the age of 50–60.

⁴ During the years 2004–2005 the increase in the number of married couples with children within the group of couples taking divorce (62% changed into 68%) while the change in fraction was getting bigger as the number of children raised increased.

⁵ It was 1,13 among women with secondary-school education and 1,45 among women with primary-school education. Other statistics were made by the Governmental Population Board (2003), which estimated that total fertility rates were as follows: 1,25 – among women with higher education, 1,11 – among women with secondary-school education, 1,58 – among women with apprenticeship education after primary school, 1,53 – among women with primary school education, 0,32 – among women without a full primary-school education (RRL 2004, p. 107). The differences between the two sources do not reduce the giant gap between fertility rates across educational division.

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CHILD POVERTY IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE CITY OF ŁÓDŹ)

Wielisława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska

University of Łódź, Łódź

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge about the poverty among urban residents, including children, is limited and incomplete. National reports published on the basis of the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions and on surveys of the household budgets are insufficient to describe the situation in the smaller administrative units. That is the reason why the main source of our knowledge concerning poverty and its characteristics in local communities are scientific research projects conducted in particular cities or within particular communities. The results of those researches cannot, however, be generalized. Hence the annotation, in the title of the article, that the study concerns only one particular city.

Research on poverty in Łódź¹ had been conducted systematically since the beginning of the 1990s by the Institute of Sociology, University of Łódź. Characteristic trait of the approach that was chosen by the Łódź research group² is the conjugation of research with an analysis into the functioning of social welfare and the professional development of the social workers³. Łódź's research, commenced in 1993, transcends beyond the usual standards and has become an inspiration to other teams of researchers. The innovative approach characterized by a continuously increasing knowledge of the social phenomena and the process of falling into poverty by analyzing new dimensions and problem groups as well as the team who have taken this approach have gained recognition in the academia and is known as the Łódź school of research on poverty and social welfare⁴.

Discovering that the risk of poverty is, contrary to popular opinion, bigger amongst children than adults has turned the attention of the research team to the phenomena of child poverty and the risk of intergenerational transmission of poverty⁵. At the same time, identifying that in the poverty enclaves every second child was most at risk of falling into poverty in contrast with every fifth child in the city (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 1999), has prompted us to pay careful attention to the lives of the children from poor families during a longer time span.

Taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the Operational Program Human Capital, (Regulation 7.2.1), starting July 1st 2008 the research team has undertaken the project 'WZLOT—Strengthening opportunities and weakening transmission of poverty among inhabitants of the towns in the Łódź Province (Voivodship)'⁶, the initial results of which, referring to the city of Łódź, shall be presented in this paper. The project consists of four interconnected conceptual researches⁷ that were to answer the following questions:

1. Are the places defined as 'poverty enclaves' still over-represented by poor people (receiving welfare benefits), and thus, has the poverty been 'solidified' in those urban areas?

2. Is there a process of poverty transmission in the 'poverty enclaves' to next generations? In other words, do children of poor parents, after reaching legal age, too become welfare beneficiaries?

3. Is there a risk of transferring poverty to another generation of the descendants of the previous (10 years ago) residents of the 'enclaves' and does teenage parenthood constitute its driving force?

4. Do current living conditions, school situation and social relations of children from schools located in the 'poverty enclaves' and students with disabilities from poor families, predict poverty in adulthood?

Groups surveyed for the WZLOT Project included:

1) students of schools located in the 'poverty enclaves'⁸;

2) teenage mothers and teenage fathers living in the 'poverty enclaves' who became parents in 2002 or later⁹;

3) members of dispersed extended families living in Łódź's 'poverty enclaves' 10 years ago, especially those who were still children in 1998¹⁰;

4) teenagers with motor disability, their parents and teachers¹¹.

It is important to note, that this is first such research in Poland of children living in an urban setting that is degraded both physically and socially. Moreover, this is the first panel research of poor people living in 'poverty enclaves', conducted with the same people after a period of ten years¹².

In the WZLOT project, the researchers assumed that the experience of poverty in childhood, especially in a socially and spatially degraded social environment, poses a threat of poverty transmission in the life cycle of an individual and in an intergenerational perspective. Therefore, the theoretical inspiration for this project was based on two kinds of concepts: first – those that explain the significance of poverty in childhood for the future life of an individual (Shonkoff, Phillips eds. 2000), second, those that offer explanations of solidification of poverty in particular parts of urban setting (Sampson 2009; Wacquant 2008; Kazepov 2009).

Data presented below illustrates the dynamics of poverty in Łódź against the background of the Łódź province and against Poland on the basis of transformed data¹³ from the annual reports of social assistance agencies. Next, I indicate the permanence of poverty in the same parts of Łódź and present the preliminary results of the WZLOT project, with special attention given to those facts and mechanisms that might lead to the further 'solidification' of poverty in those regions and its intergenerational transmission.

THE DYNAMICS OF CHILD POVERTY IN POLAND, IN THE ŁÓDŹ PROVINCE AND IN THE CITY OF ŁÓDŹ

Diverse sources agree that the tendency of an increased percentage of people living in poor households, which is occurring in Poland since the beginning of the political transformation of 1989 and till 2004, has been reversed since 2005. Statistical data shows that the extent of poverty in Poland is systematically decreasing; regardless of the poverty line used. According to Eurostat, which sets the poverty line at 60% median of equivalent income, the rate of the 'risk of poverty' amongst the total population in Poland leveled in 2005 at 21% and was 5 points higher than the median in the European Union, in 2006 it was 19% and was 3 points higher than the median in the European Union, and in 2007 it was 17% (there is no data about the median poverty rate in the EU-27 states for this year (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2009)¹⁴. Central Statistical Office of